
APPENDIX A

Oil Spills Since the *Exxon Valdez*

Between June 1988 and June 1989 there were five to six thousand spills involving oil and other toxic substances along the coasts and in other navigable waters of the United States. Of these spills, twelve were classified as major because they involved 100,000 gallons or more.¹ The months since the Valdez spill have clearly demonstrated that the problem of oil spills will continue. Three significant oil spills that occurred between 23 and 25 June 1989 involved over 1.25 million gallons together. The Corps of Engineers monitored each of these spills and offered support.

The first of these spills occurred on the Delaware River. At 4:40 A.M. on Friday, 23 June 1989, the 749-foot Uruguayan tanker *Presidente Rivera*, fully loaded with 430,000 barrels of #6 crude oil, ran aground in the Delaware River at Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania. Roughly 800,000 gallons of the heavy crude poured into the water and spread over a fifteen-mile stretch of the river. The vessel agent/owner hired cleanup contractors (Underwater Technics). Initially the contractors could not get enough equipment or personnel to contain the spill effectively, and the Coast Guard had no available alternative, so the National Guard was called in. The National Guard provided 300 people and local contractors had 250 workers on-site, plus roughly 150 local volunteers. The American Dredging Company furnished three bucket dredges and numerous barges for containment of contaminated material.

The standard response failed. On Monday, 26 June, hundreds of thousands of gallons of thick oil, in chunks varying from the size of golf balls to six feet in length, continued spreading over the Delaware River and its tributaries, pushing aside booms or slipping under them and clogging skimming equipment. At a bird rookery, Pea Patch Island, workers supplemented the booms with nets and shovels, but found their bare hands to be the most effective tool. The Corps'

Philadelphia District EOC sent a representative to the Multi-Agency Local Response Team meetings twice a day. The Coast Guard initially asked for certain Corps resources: a driftmaster from New York District; small boats to supplement the Coast Guard capability; and a survey boat to assist in identifying the location of oil.² The Corps dispatched the surveyboat *Buckley* from the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal on Saturday, 24 June, and the next day it began a survey of federal navigation channels in areas designated by the Captain of the Port in Philadelphia.

Brigadier General Kelly sent Robert J. Hopman, acting Chief of Dredging, Navigation Branch, HQUSACE, to find ways that the Corps could provide assistance. After meeting with Philadelphia District officials, Hopman toured the cleanup site by boat. The Corps mobilized the crane barge *Titan* and two deck cargo barges, but on 28 June the Coast Guard cancelled all requests for Corps resources. The *Titan* resumed normal operations on the Delaware River; the two cargo barges returned to Fort Mifflin; and the driftmaster returned to New York harbor.³

At 6:20 P.M. on 23 June 1989 a Panamanian freighter, *Rachel B.*, collided with a barge owned by the Coastal Towing Company near the mouth of the Houston Ship Channel. Although the *Rachel B.* was not damaged significantly, three damaged port tanks on the barge poured approximately six thousand barrels of heavy #6 crude oil into Galveston Bay. The Coast Guard temporarily closed the ship channel to traffic. A coastal towing contractor, Garner Environmental, arrived on-site around 8:30 that night and began cleanup operations. Adverse weather conditions throughout the week hampered cleanup efforts. Some oil escaped into the bay where containment booms broke in the severe weather. Small oil patches and larger surface slicks washed onto the bird islands and the oyster reefs about three quarters of a mile off Smith Point.⁴

On 23 June 1989, a medium-sized oil tanker with a cargo of heating oil hit a reef near the entrance to Narragansett Bay, near Newport, Rhode Island, spreading a slick five miles long in the first few hours. The 532-foot *World Prodigy*, a Greek-registered tanker with a cargo of 195,000 barrels (8.1 million gallons) of oil hit Breton reef, two miles off shore,

about 4:20 P.M. The Coast Guard reported that the tanker was surrounded by boom within three hours, but roughly 420,000 gallons of highly toxic #2 fuel oil spilled in Narragansett Bay. The oil, which was lighter than that at Valdez, evaporated quickly. Seventy percent of the oil evaporated in the first two days. By 25 June the spill had spread 20 miles to the north, endangering the rich marine resources of the bay and contaminating beaches.⁵

On 24 June the Corps notified the Coast Guard that it had equipment, personnel, and expertise ready to assist them in any or all of the three spills. A dredge available in New York District could be converted to recover oil. District Engineers in each of the three locations were in constant communication with the Coast Guard and awaited instructions to assist. The Coast Guard, however, had the spills under control. General Kelly contacted Rear Admiral Joel D. Sipes in Coast Guard headquarters and offered Corps assistance.⁶

The three spills in June posed less of an environmental threat than originally feared, but they did focus attention on the system of transporting oil through the nation's waterways and on the question of whether there should be tougher laws and tougher enforcement. The weakness of the National Contingency Plan was again apparent. Only if the spiller cannot be identified or refuses to respond can the federal government step in. In the case of the spills in Rhode Island and Delaware, which involved foreign tankers, the federal government took on cleanup duties immediately.

Oil spills continued throughout the year, both large and small. On 13 September 1989 the barge *Morania*, carrying 4,000,000 gallons of gasoline, ran aground in the East River, spilling approximately 100,000 gallons of gasoline. The Coast Guard closed the waterway to marine traffic because of the potential fire hazard. The gasoline dissipated and the East River Bridge was reopened the next morning.⁷

On 14 November 1989 a Greek cargo ship, *Milos Reefer*, ran aground in the Bering Sea at the national wildlife refuge off Matthew Island in Alaskan waters. The 485-foot ship was loaded with 71,320 gallons of diesel oil and 285 gallons of intermediate fuel oil. Oil seeped from the vessel, leaving a 2,000-gallon trail several miles long. Two weeks later, on 28 November, a government contractor, Olshan, Inc., broke

an abandoned underground pipeline while performing a demolition contract on the Fort Point Reservation in Galveston, Texas. The break resulted in a fifty-gallon spill of an unidentified petroleum product.⁸

In early June 1990 an explosion occurred on the *Mega Borg* sixty miles southeast of Galveston, and the resulting fire raged for days. By 12 June the crude oil spill stretched for thirteen miles and spread into light scattered pockets along the Gulf. Galveston District stood by ready to provide manpower and contracting capability. On 13 June the fire was under control and the slick was no longer burning, but a major cleanup effort remained.⁹ In addition to the spills described above, there were many others of varying size, each presenting its own unique problems.

Notes

1. *New York Times*, 29 June 1989.
2. Philadelphia District, POLREP #1, n.d.
3. Philadelphia District, POLREP #2, 27 June 1989; Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works), Memorandum for the Secretary of the Army, 28 June 1989.
4. Galveston District, SITREP #2, 25 June 1989; *New York Times*, 25 June 1989.
5. *New York Times*, 24 June 1989; *ibid.*, 25 June 1989.
6. Page Memorandum, 27 June 1989; Brig. Gen. Patrick Kelly, Memorandum Through Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) for Secretary of the Army, 28 June 1989.
7. New York District, SITREP, 3 Oct. 1989.
8. *New York Times*, 18 Nov. 1989; Galveston District, Situation Report, 29 Nov. 1989.
9. Galveston District, POLREP #3, 12 June 1990; *ibid.* #4, 13 June 1990.